

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 10, 2013

Agenda Item: 2013 Fall Upland Game Bird Quotas and Limits - Final

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Quotas/Limits

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background: Upland game bird season dates for 2013 were finalized in February 2012. Other season elements include bag and possession limits and special permit quotas (turkeys). While limits seldom change from year to year, Adaptive Harvest Management for sage grouse annually assesses populations and bag limits. AHM recommends a conservative two-bird bag limit if average lek counts are below the long-term average of about 30 males/lek on nearly 90 pre-selected leks. There is also a provision for not opening the season based on consistently low average lek counts (45% or more below long-term average) over a three-year period. If the average count exceeds the long term average, AHM recommends a standard four-bird bag limit.

Heightened public awareness surrounding sage grouse, and potential habitat impacts from energy development, resulted in the FWP Commission adopting a conservative two-bird bag limit in 2007, a year of above-average lek counts (33.6 males/lek). The two-bird bag limit was maintained during 2008 - 2010 with annual survey averages of 22.9, 23.3, and 20.5 males/lek for 2008, 2009 and 2010, respectively.

2011 lek surveys revealed a 6% decline from 2010 to 19.2 males/lek. The 2012 lek surveys revealed no real change from 2011 with an average 19.1 males/lek. This was approximately 66% of the long term average. At the statewide level this was above the closure trigger of three consecutive years at 45% or more below the long term average. As such, the conservative two-bird bag and twice the daily bag possession limit for sage grouse was again proposed and adopted for 2011 and 2012.

The 2013 lek survey effort revealed an average 14.9 males/lek, which is 48% below the long term average. Based on localized data, production was relatively poor in 2011 due to extreme rainfall during the nesting period. This may influence low male counts for several years. Winter conditions have been generally favorable for over-winter hen survival. FWP proposes a two-bird bag limit and twice the daily bag possession limit for sage grouse in 2013, which represents no change from 2012. At the commission's request, attached are options for more conservative seasons that could be considered for sage grouse.

FWP also proposes a permit quota change for the Gallatin County fall turkey hunts. The 375-50 permits would be increased from 10 to 50, while permits for the 375-51 youth hunt would be increased from 2 to 10.

Reflecting the typically static nature of upland bird bag and possession limits as supported by biology and management history, all other upland game bird bag, possession limits and permit quotas are proposed unchanged from 2012 or as otherwise finalized during season structure changes in February 2012. This includes staff consideration of other fall turkey permits.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Public comment ran through 5:00 PM, Monday, June 24. FWP received 10 comments. The comments voiced support for the proposals along with suggested adjustments to upland bird season frameworks. One comment strongly opposed hunting.

Alternatives and Analysis: Status and species biology does not require more conservative limits at this time.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends adopting the proposed changes and otherwise maintaining 2012 bag and possession limits and permit quotas for all upland game birds. This is consistent with known biology, management history and survey efforts to date. Season dates were previously set.

Proposed Motion

I move to adopt the final 2013 upland game bird bag and possession limits and permit quotas as presented by FWP.